

Chapter 4

The Maltese Islands and the Religious Culture of the Hospitallers: Isolation and Connectivity c.1540s–c.1690s

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Introduction

On 25 June 1605, the French Hospitaller Frà Petro Queyran recounted this story in front of the Inquisitor:

Some two months ago I was discoursing with a servant-at-arms of the Langue of Provence called monsieur di Barducci ... he told me that one day he went hunting in the company of a Spanish knight of the Langue of Castille who at present is the Captain of the village of Birkirkara [this was Frà Antonio Moretto Giron][.] The said [Giron] told Barducci ... [‘I will show you something terrifying but you need to avoid making the sign of the cross, and you should not be afraid[’] [.] Barducci replied that he would not be afraid even if he were to behold all the Devils[!] [Giron] then told Barducci to turn his face around and look towards the sea[.] Having done so, Barducci saw a whole troop of armoured horses and black men riding horses and these surrounded them[.] Barducci saw one of these [black men] with his sword unsheathed moving towards him and getting ready to strike him. Frightened by what he saw, the said Barducci pronounced the name of Jesus and all the men and armoured horses immediately dissolved.¹

This account was part of a series of allegations concerning Frà Antonio Moretto Giron and it reveals much about the religious culture of Hospitallers during the Maltese phase of their history. The term ‘religious culture’ – adapted from the work of Adnan A. Husain – is used rather than ‘religion’ to indicate a broad concern with ‘the vast range of phenomena that characterize the living, historical experience and diverse practices’ of Hospitallers, highlighting ‘the intercourse and interaction, conflict and competition’ among the various influences that together shaped Hospitaller faith.² These influences included Protestantism, Counter-

¹ AIM Vol. 168 Case 26, fol. 1r–v, 25 June 1605.

² Adnan A. Husain, ‘Introduction: Approaching Islam and the religious cultures of the medieval and early modern Mediterranean’, Adnan A. Husain and Katherine E. Fleming

Reformation Roman Catholicism and magical practices, as well as Islam, all of which found their way into Malta and there developed, through both ‘isolation’ and ‘connectivity’, into particular models for the Hospitallers.

The case studies discussed throughout this chapter are intended to highlight the flexibility of an ‘island approach’. This can be applied not only to physical islands, but also to metaphorical islands, such as galleys and rural villages, which, due to various physical and cultural factors, assume the traits of insularity. The level of isolation and connectivity will be measured in terms of the religious and not-so-religious practices of Hospitaller book culture, as well as the ability of the Inquisition to reach out across geographical and cultural spaces. The present contribution uses documents from the Archive of the Inquisition of Malta to look at how, and to what extent, Hospitaller religious culture was affected by their presence on the Maltese islands and by the two factors of isolation and connectivity.

Isolation and Connectivity

Karla Mallette’s study of Muslim Lucera, in Southern Italy, commences with an overview of the term ‘insular’ as found in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) and the term ‘isolare’ as found in the *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* (*dizionario*). Both words – derived from the word ‘island’ – acquired a negative and largely political connotation during the course of the nineteenth century. Prior to that, however, they did not carry any particularly negative or positive association.³ The *OED* lists extensive entries for ‘island’ and its derivatives ‘insulation’, ‘isolation’, ‘insularity’, and ‘insular’. The emphasis in each case is on being cut off, and on a negative separateness; in turn, islanders are seen to have ‘the characteristic traits of the inhabitants of an island’.⁴ Geography, it seems, can make one peculiar. The *dizionario* also contains extensive entries for ‘isola’ (island) and its derivatives ‘isolamento’ (isolation), ‘isolare’ (to isolate) and ‘isolato’ (isolated).⁵ Here isolation can be positive; the entry for ‘isolare’ states that through isolation one can increase defensive efficiency and even increase the prominence of a location.⁶ On the other hand, various entries highlight the negativity of isolation, including its tendency to be linked with solitude.⁷ Mallette warns not to extend too easily such understandings of island-isolation to Mediterranean islands during the Middle Ages: ‘[o]n the contrary the affliction of

(eds) *A Faithful Sea* (Oxford, 2007), p. 6.

³ Karla Mallette, ‘Insularity: A literary history of Muslim Lucera’, *A Faithful Sea*, pp. 27–9.

⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com [6 January 2011].

⁵ Salvatore Battaglia, *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* (Turin, 1961), pp. 578–82.

⁶ *Grande dizionario*, p. 580.

⁷ *Grande dizionario*, pp. 579–82.

Mediterranean islands tended to be the opposite: an inability to protect themselves from a too promiscuous connectivity.⁸

Lying some 90 kilometres south of Sicily, the Maltese Islands have an area of just 316 square kilometres. In *The Mediterranean*, Fernand Braudel laid out an analysis of Mediterranean navigation in which the predominant form of sailing was *costeggiare*: ships moving along the shoreline. He also showed how ships travelling from East to West generally passed through the Straits of Messina.⁹ In this equation Malta was cut off from the main routes. Horden and Purcell, in *The Corrupting Sea*, consider this to be an oversimplification. They argue that islands – like Malta – lie in fact at the heart of the medium of interdependence since they have what they call all-round connectivity.¹⁰

The geography of the Maltese Islands is a combination of insulation and smallness; their history is a combination of isolation and connectivity. Isolation is almost always a matter of degree: the sea isolated Malta but was also its medium of constant connectivity. Hence, when writing the history of the Hospitallers on Malta, one ought to stand intellectually in such a way as to both look outwards to the sea, and inland from it. This is a point made by those inspired by the ‘new thalassology’, or study of the sea.¹¹ As evinced in the story above, the sea was a source of danger, and the Hospitallers – true to their warrior identity – projected their fears in military terms. The armoured horses and black men were a representation of the all-too-real onslaught by Muslim forces on Christian shores and shipping (of course, the onslaught worked in both directions). Here is a reminder of one type of connectivity – albeit an unwelcome one – which ensured that Malta’s isolation was only ever relative.

One gauge which has often been used to measure the isolation of early modern Malta concerns the amount and nature of books available. In the mid-1630s, Inquisitor Fabio Chigi complained about the absence of books. Similarly, in 1716, Giacomo Capello, Venice’s envoy in Malta, complained that books in Malta were rare. Both Chigi and Capello were first-rate minds who left detailed records documenting various aspects of life on Malta, but when it came to books they may have missed the woods for the trees.¹² The absence of book production and the

⁸ Mallette, ‘Insularity’, p. 29. See also Charles Dalli, ‘Medieval island societies: Reassessing insulation in a central Mediterranean context’, *Al-Masaq – Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean*, 10 (1998), p. 80.

⁹ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II*, 2 vols (Berkeley, CA, 1995), pp. 103, 116.

¹⁰ Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea* (Oxford, 2000), p. 225.

¹¹ Karen Wigen, ‘Oceans of history’, *American Historical Review*, 111:3 (2006), p. 717. Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, ‘The Mediterranean and “the New Thalassology”’, *American Historical Review*, 111:3 (2006), pp. 722–40. Henk Driessen, ‘Seascapes and Mediterranean crossings’, *Journal of Global History*, 3 (2008), p. 446.

¹² *Fabio Chigi Apostolic Delegate in Malta (1634–1639)*, Vincent Borg (ed.) (Vatican City, 1967). *Descrittione di Malta anno 1716*, Victor Mallia-Milanes (ed.) (Malta, 1988).

low level of literacy among the inhabitants of Malta did not indicate an absence of books. Studies have shown that there were, over time, various libraries operating in Malta.¹³ However, possibly more significant than such institutional libraries were the books owned by Hospitallers, which are known from the inventories drawn up at their deaths or the records of the Inquisition.¹⁴

A survey of the criminal proceedings of the Inquisition of Malta 1546–1696 reveals that various Hospitallers owned or perused a range of works. The detail of the record made of these books, and the nature of the books themselves, varied greatly. Religious titles included material from England, a Bible in French and one in German.¹⁵ Holders of these items were suspected of Protestant sympathies. Books of a political nature included the *Relaciones* of Antonio Pérez (1540–1611), which criticized King Philip II (1527–1598) of Spain, as well as works by Ferrante Pallavicino (1615–1644) that satirized the Roman curia. Humanistic influences can be discerned in the presence of works by Erasmus (1466/69–1536), the poem *L'Adone* by Giovanni Battista Marino (1569–1625), and a book of poems by the French poet Clément Marot (1496–1544).¹⁶ These, too, caused a strong suspicion of Protestant influences. Works of a historical nature included Jean de Serres's *Inventaire general* on French history and a book on the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa (1122–1190). Serres was a Protestant, which made anything by him immediately suspect, while Barbarossa was associated with challenges to papal authority.¹⁷ Books on military affairs included one on duelling by a Neapolitan author, quite possibly Girolamo Muzio's (1496–1576) *Il Duello* (Venice, 1550).¹⁸ Such a work was suspected because of the threat which duelling was considered to pose to established authority. Nonetheless, the majority of identified titles belonged to the category of magic and the occult. The astrologer and alchemist Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1535) appeared three times. In one instance, a book of his was used by a Hospitaller to cast a spell over a dog, making it immune to bullets; this was a way for a group of Hospitallers to pass the time.¹⁹ One Hospitaller owned a work by the Renaissance

¹³ Frans Ciappara, *Society and the Inquisition in Early Modern Malta* (Malta, 2001), pp. 107–8. William Zammit, 'An unknown work by de Soldanis', *Journal of Maltese Studies*, 27 (2010), pp. 96–100.

¹⁴ On books in the possession of Hospitallers at their demise see Stefan Cachia, 'The Treasury, debts and deaths' (Unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Malta, 2004), pp. 204–5, *et passim*.

¹⁵ AIM Vol. 1A Case 1, fol. 17r, 14 April 1546; Vol. 171 Case 193, n.p., 17 December 1649; Vol. 171 Case 259(2), n.p., 13 February 1696.

¹⁶ AIM Vol. 4A Case 4, fols 28r–29r, 11 September 1577; Vol. 171 Case 208, n.p., December 1655; Vol. 171 Case 225, n.p., 26 May 1664.

¹⁷ AIM Vol. 170 Case 136, n.p., 2 April 1624; Vol. 170 Case 137, n.p., 13 August 1624.

¹⁸ AIM Vol. 169 Case 90, fol. 1r, 15 April 1607; Vol. 171 Case 189, n.p., 22 October 1648.

¹⁹ AIM Vol. 170 Case 105, n.p., 22 December 1611; Vol. 170 Case 152, n.p., 4 June 1633; Vol. 171 Case 218, n.p., 20 December 1660.

physician and occultist Paracelsus (1493–1541), while another possessed the *Clavicula Salomonis*, a seventeenth-century textbook of magic and demonology.²⁰ One German knight had various superstitious writings, which included extracts from the legendary letter that Christ supposedly sent to King Abgar of Edessa.²¹ In many such instances, the emphasis was on the role of magic in manipulating worldly affairs and the possibility of healing various ailments. Such ideas were opposed by the Catholic Church because of the assumption that forces beyond God and the Church could manipulate circumstances and individual will.

The works mentioned here probably barely scratch the surface of what was actually in possession of Hospitallers in Malta; it is impossible to tell what quantities and titles managed to escape Inquisitorial attention and therefore recording. At their death, books owned by Hospitallers were meant to pass to the Order; however, as indicated in one case from 1635, this did not always happen. A group of Hospitallers carefully hid away the books of a deceased friend before Treasury officials came along to take his possessions.²² Again, it is difficult to know how widespread such practices may have been. What the available evidence does tell us, is that in terms of the works circulating among Hospitallers in early modern Malta, this was far from being an isolated outpost; books connected Hospitallers with wider European intellectual currents.

Another form of connectivity can be termed ‘Inquisition connectivity’. This refers to the substantial number of cases in the archive of the Inquisition of Malta from which, through the reports made by those sailing onboard vessels, we learn about daily routines and their interruptions. The long hand of the Inquisition connected places and individuals through eyewitness narratives, which brought the Mediterranean world into the small Inquisition courtroom. Here, a macro world of navigation and encounters was adapted to a micro-scale situation concerned with the religious culture of the Hospitallers.

David F. Allen has described Hospitaller galleys ‘as a “parish at sea”, a microcosm of that society left behind on *terra ferma*.’²³ The Hospitaller Chaplain Frà Giovanni Domenico Manso wrote some instructions for galley chaplains. Manso argued that irreligious behaviour, the reading of prohibited books in particular, had to be reported to the Inquisition.²⁴ In fact, people on board Hospitaller vessels, in particular Hospitaller chaplains, diligently observed and reported to the Inquisitor any suspect behaviour. There was very little difference between seaborne and land-

²⁰ AIM Vol. 170 Case 153 1633, n.p., 12 October 1633; Vol. 171 Case 188, n.p., 24 September 1674. On magic in early modern Europe see James A. Sharpe, ‘Magic and witchcraft’, *A companion to the Reformation world*, Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia (ed.) (Malden, MA and Oxford, 2004), pp. 440–43.

²¹ AIM Vol. 171 Case 232, n.p., 8 August 1672.

²² AIM Vol. 170 Case 156, n.p., 9 February 1635.

²³ David F. Allen, ‘A parish at sea: Spiritual concerns aboard the Order of St John’s galleys in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries’, *MO* 1, p. 113.

²⁴ Allen, ‘A parish at sea’, p. 117.

based misdemeanours: eating prohibited foods on days of abstinence, magical practices, blasphemy, heretical ideas inspired by contact with Protestantism and Islam, as well as reading prohibited literature.²⁵ One crime that was specific to life at sea concerned the fate of slaves whose religious identity was ambiguous. In December 1607, Captain Musu de Frascinet (French Hospitaller), was accused of having sold some Russian and Hungarian women – who may have been Christians – at the Messina slave market. These women had been found on a Turkish galleon plundered by Frà Frascinet. He sold them at Messina to avoid interference from the Inquisition of Malta, but he was caught out nonetheless.²⁶ In August 1654, Captain Don Antonio Correa de Sousa (Hospitaller) was similarly accused of selling a Christian slave he had captured. The Chaplain on board this galley, Don Ignatio Lubono, described how this Piedmontese renegade had been overjoyed to be back among Christians until Frà de Sousa sold him back into slavery.²⁷

Going through Inquisition documents one gets an impression of the sense of freedom from social and religious constraints felt by various Hospitallers when they were at sea. For instance, in 1622, the 22-year-old Frà Joannes Rollo (French) described most of the crew on his vessel eating meat, eggs and cheese throughout Lent.²⁸ Each sailing vessel was an island, isolated, insulated and small, with its own particular rhythms; yet as a moving island it remained cut off only until it touched land or engaged in battle. Even when a vessel was out at sea – where freedom was at its greatest – the cases just cited show that freedom and isolation were often restricted by Inquisition connectivity. In fact, this is an instance where connectivity was an unwelcome intrusion into the isolation of sailing.

²⁵ These observations are based on the following representative sample: AIM Vol. 3B Case 50 fols 516–520, September 1579; Vol. 169 Case 57 fols 6r–7r, 28 June 1587; Vol. 169 Case 91 fols 1r–4r, 20 December 1607; Vol. 170 Case 104 n.p., 13 October 1611; Vol. 170 Case 110, n.p., 2 October 1613; Vol. 170 Case 126, n.p., 20 December 1621; Vol. 170 Case 129, n.p., 25 March 1622; Vol. 170 Case 130, n.p., 5 March 1622; Vol. 170 Case 142, n.p., 6 May 1630; Vol. 170 Case 164, n.p., 20 December 1640; Vol. 170 Case 173, n.p., 5 October 1642; Vol. 171 Case 197, n.p., 28 January 1650; Vol. 171 Case 201, n.p., 14 October 1653; Vol. 171 Case 206, n.p., 19 August 1654; Vol. 171 Case 210, n.p., 18 February 1656; Vol. 171 Case 234, n.p., 19 December 1674; Vol. 171 Case 239, n.p., 30 September 1677; Vol. 171 Case 241, n.p., 7 July 1678; Vol. 171 Case 242, n.p., 6 July 1678; Vol. 171 Case 256, n.p., 6 October 1689; Vol. 171 Case 257, n.p., 7 March 1689; Vol. 171 Case 259(2), n.p., 13 February 1696.

²⁶ AIM Vol. 169 Case 91 fols 1r–4r, 20 December 1607.

²⁷ AIM Vol. 171 Case 206 n.p., 19 August 1654.

²⁸ AIM Vol. 170, Case 129, n.p., 25 March 1622; see also Vol. 170, Case 126, n.p., 20 December 1621.

Hospitaller Religious Culture

The Reformation had a huge impact on the Order of St John, both because it was a religious institution and because it was a major land holder. In certain circumstances, the Order of St John – along with the Teutonic Order – managed to ‘retain many of [their] estates as Catholic “islands” in Protestant countries’.²⁹ Protestant ideas among Hospitallers in Malta were first recorded in 1546, and by the 1580s the Inquisition of Malta had largely controlled this outbreak. Nonetheless, evidence of ongoing interest among Hospitallers in reformed religion is scattered throughout Inquisition records. And these records attest to the fact that the impact of the so-called ‘Long Reformation’ was felt among Hospitallers in the Maltese Islands; evidence of Hospitallers interested in Protestant ideas can be discerned well into the seventeenth century.³⁰ Ideas that originated far from Maltese shores found their way into Malta, where they were played out in a setting shaped by isolation, smallness and connectivity.

Accusations of religious unorthodoxy from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were clearly focused on Protestantism and evinced a strong mistrust of Germans and of those who were in France during the French Wars of Religion (1562–1698). In 1575, the Hospitaller Chaplain Frà Grimaldo Marmara was described as a Huguenot who had fought against Catholics in France; moreover, instead of wearing his religious habit he dressed as a soldier and participated in Huguenot congregations.³¹ In 1597, the German knight Frà Hert was reported to have said that he believed Martin Luther.³² The German *Auberge* in Valletta was viewed with suspicion: in 1597, Father Josepho Blancian, a chaplain to the German *Auberge*, told the Inquisitor that he preferred not to eat at the *Auberge* because the Pilier and other knights showed an extremely irreverent attitude towards the Catholic priesthood.³³ The impression from Inquisitorial documents is that the German *Auberge* was viewed as a religious island, harbouring within it unorthodox ideas which necessitated containment.

As one moves further into the seventeenth century, clear labels such as ‘Lutheran’ become rarer, but doubts expressed on various aspects of the Catholic faith evince influences from Protestantism. In 1630, the French knight Frà de

²⁹ Klaus Militzer, ‘Introduction’, *The Military Orders and the Reformation*, Johannes A. Mol, Klaus Militzer and Helen Nicholson (eds) (Hilversum, 2006), p. 6. See also Christoph T. Maier, ‘Strategies of survival: the Military Orders and the Reformation in Switzerland’, *MO* 2, pp. 355–64.

³⁰ On the ‘Long Reformation’ see Thomas A. Brady Jr., ‘From Revolution to Long Reformation: Writings in English on the German Reformation, 1970–2005’, *Archive of Reformation History*, 100 (2009), pp. 48–64, esp. 57–63.

³¹ AIM Vol. 167, Case 3, n.p., 1 September 1575.

³² AIM Vol. 169 Case 66, fol. 1r, 19 December 1597.

³³ AIM Vol. 169 Case 67, fols 4r–v, 4 December 1597; see also C.A.M., AIM, C.P., Vol. 170 Case 121, n.p., 22 December 1617/18.

Ciampanin expressed doubts about the role of the saints and the Pope.³⁴ Similarly, in 1656, the German knight Frà Christiano Hauster Hausen burst into an anti-Jesuit lament, criticizing their interference in affairs that were not their business and arguing that Luther had been right to criticize the sale of indulgences.³⁵

The instances described above refer to a world of intra-Hospitaller exchanges, largely disconnected from its Maltese surroundings (meaning not just Maltese natives, but also the extensive number of transient foreigners and Muslim slaves to be found in Malta); parallel lives in a setting of smallness. There were, however, points of convergence, where Hospitaller faith came into contact with Maltese realities. One such area is that of Hospitallers appointed as 'Captains' to manage the local government of Maltese districts known as 'parishes'. These Captains – and at times their concubines – were resented because of the levies of food, fodder, mounts and forced labour they imposed on their communities. At the same time, they served as a source of patronage at the local level.³⁶ Information on the activities of these Captains is hard to come by, but cases from the Inquisition provide some insight into the religious culture of the Hospitallers at this local and fairly isolated level.

During the years 1602–1603, Frà Jacobo Brutin was the subject of an Inquisitorial investigation. He was Captain of the Parish of Bir Miftuh and resided in the village of Gudja. Various parishioners were disturbed by aspects of his behaviour. The priest Don Matteo Xiricha learnt that the Captain considered the sermons preached at the Conventual Church of St John to be false; Don Xiricha had obtained this information from Bernardo Coasman, who in turn had heard it from the son of a local taverner in Gudja.³⁷ Benedicto Hellul, who for a time was a servant of the Captain, said that the Captain ate prohibited foods during Lent. Moreover, when Hellul had told the Captain of an image of the Virgin Mary which was said to have performed a miracle, the following exchange of arguments between the Captain and Hellul followed:

The Captain said: '[W]hat miracles[?] [T]hese are all just words[!] I do not believe in these miracles, [and] am amazed at you lot, [for] what miracles can images perform [and] what are images and what is their use[?]'

Hellul replied: 'Sir [images] are useful since by seeing the images we are reminded of the saints'[,]

³⁴ AIM Vol. 170 Case 142 n.p., 6 May 1630.

³⁵ AIM Vol. 171 Case 209, n.p., 9 September 1656.

³⁶ Lionel Butler, 'The Maltese People and the Order of St. John in the Sixteenth Century', *Annales de l'Ordre Souverain Militaire de Malte*, xxiv (1966), p. 96. Godfrey Wettinger, 'Early Maltese popular attitudes to the government of the Order of St John', *Melita Historica*, 6:3 (1974), pp. 268–9.

³⁷ AIM Vol. 169 Case 76, fol. 1r, 9 April 1602.

The Captain answered: 'So without Images those who want to remember the saints would not remember them[?], and therefore when one wants to eat if he does not set the table, and see the table and tablecloth will he not remember that he had to eat[?]'³⁸

The Captain appeared before the Inquisitor: he admitted that he had broken abstinence during Lent and he explained that his doubts about the miraculous image of the Virgin Mary arose from the fact that an old hag was at the time making claims that the Virgin appeared to her.³⁹ Within the small confines of a Maltese rural village, a French Hospitaller Captain would have easily stood out, and would invariably have been at the centre of attention. A local tavern acted as a hub for the exchange of news and gossip. Such a rural community was bound together by a sense of cohesion, and had its own sense of insularity. The exchange between Frà Brutin and Hellul showed how Brutin's doubts about miracles clashed with the devotions of a community that was bound to the land and depended on divine intervention to meet the challenges of daily life. Two 'islands of thought' met in a very small area and clashed, but seemingly did not alter one another. It would seem that Hospitallers appointed to administer these districts of the Maltese islands thought that rural isolation would shield their actions from the eyes of their superiors and the Inquisitors. Nonetheless, as this episode from this rural Maltese community indicates, even this kind of isolation was relative. Communities gossiped about and discussed extensively their Hospitaller overlords, and they did not hesitate to draw the gaze of the Inquisition to their activities. According to Maurice Aymard, both rural and urban society conceptualized friendship as something 'extra', something that existed outside the family, often in institutions, such as the army, that replaced the family on a temporary or permanent basis. It is thus plausible to imagine that Hospitaller Captains would have appeared even more alien to the Maltese, because their whole organization was based on 'friendship', as Aymar has discussed.⁴⁰

The island of Gozo was administered by a knight with the title of Governor, who commanded the military garrison and supervised a court with its own judge to deal with civil and criminal cases.⁴¹ In 1654, the Inquisition investigated the Governor Frà Georgio Beringho.⁴² The Neapolitan priest Don Joannes Antonio described the

³⁸ AIM Vol. 168 Case 22, fol. 4r-v, 2 February 1603.

³⁹ AIM Vol. 168 Case 22, fols 8r-v.

⁴⁰ Maurice Aymard, 'Friends and Neighbours', *A History of Private Life* III, Roger Chartier (ed.) (Cambridge MA and London, 1989), p. 458.

⁴¹ Giovanni Francesco Abela, *Della descrizione di Malta* (1647), p. 123.

⁴² The identity of the Governor of Gozo in the early 1650s is unclear; see Giovanni Pietro Francesco Agius De Soldanis, 'Il Gozo Antico-moderno e Sacro-profano, Isola Mediterranea Adiacente A Malta Africana' (manuscript), English trans. *Gozo Ancient and Modern Religious and Profane*, vol. 1 (Malta, 1999), p. 146 and Joseph Galea and Raymond M. Cassar, *Malta's timeline* (Malta, 1989), p.144.

Governor of Gozo sitting in his hall, surrounded by his own ‘court’, consisting of the preacher Father Feriolo, a doctor, a notary and various others. Father Feriolo was talking about the Gospels when the Governor said that he had on various occasions heard Lutheran sermons in his country (Poland?). This disturbed those around the Governor; moreover the Governor ate meat on prohibited days.⁴³ This case study of the Governor of Gozo shows that even this island, often seen as embodying the essence of isolation and insulation, was connected, through the Hospitallers, to wider structures and currents of thought. It also shows how the Reformation cannot be properly understood if limited to Germany of the 1520s and 1530s, but must be seen as a much more long-term and geographically varied phenomenon. The Maltese Islands were a porous environment that allowed many ideas to enter; but the evidence presented here suggests that they rejected the unorthodox aspects of Hospitaller religious culture as embodied in the figure of ‘outsiders’ such as the district Captains.

Nevertheless, such a distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ often dissolved itself in the form of encounters at the local level, which were underlined by some reference to magical practices. The Captain of Birkirkara, Frà Antonio Moretto Giron (mentioned earlier) had a reputation as a sorcerer and as a healer specializing in female ailments. In September 1605, Antonina Mallia appeared in front of the Inquisitor, on the advice of her Jesuit confessor, to report Frà Giron. She reported that for several months she had suffered from chest pains, so that when she learnt that Frà Giron had a reputation as a healer she went to him for a total of five visits. Each visit consisted of her lying down on a bed, while Frà Giron touched various parts of her body and uttered certain words, sometimes from a book. He also gave her herbs to ingest. Eventually, some neighbours of hers informed her that Frà Giron was a sorcerer and she should beware; at times he tried to have sexual intercourse with her, but she did not let him, except on the final visit.⁴⁴ Plenty of gossip and rumour circulated about Frà Giron, in particular regarding the question of his healing talents and whether these made him a sorcerer. Various other witnesses – men, women, Hospitallers, clergy – appear in the documents dealing with Frà Giron. Whether they considered him as an evil sorcerer or a good Christian patron of the poor, it is clear that Frà Giron was extensively involved with his local community. He himself declared that he had learnt his healing arts from a soldier he had met 20 years previously while sailing.⁴⁵ He brought this outside knowledge to the community of Birkirkara where his practices became ‘indigenized’.

Within the small confines of Malta, Hospitallers regularly turned to prostitutes, Muslim slaves and Jews to acquire magical remedies for all kinds of purposes, in particular, ways to gain the affection of women. In 1625, the Spanish Hospitaller Frà Gaspare Aldaretti and his girlfriend Annica visited a courtesan to learn a method to improve one’s fortune in love and gambling. This involved using a particular herb,

⁴³ AIM Vol. 171 Case 204, n.p., 16 April 1654.

⁴⁴ AIM Vol. 169 Case 180, fol. 1r, 7 September 1604.

⁴⁵ AIM Vol. 168 Case 26, fols 1–19, 25 June 1605.

a tablecloth and blessed candles.⁴⁶ When the French Hospitaller Frà Baptista de Pradina wanted to visit a woman whose relatives were opposed to her seeing him, he sought out a galley slave known for his skills in making magical remedies. The slave said he could help Frà Baptista in return for a few *scudi*. The complex magical procedure involved dolls representing the woman's relatives being sunk in water and vinegar and then exposed to fire.⁴⁷ In 1602, Frà Alessandro Pagano, finding himself irresistibly drawn to a woman, sought out a Jewish couple to help him tame the flame that burnt in his heart and to discover whether what he felt was the result of some sorcery the woman had inflicted upon him.⁴⁸ Despite Malta's smallness, there certainly was no lack of supply of magical solutions.

Conclusion

The inception of the Hospitaller presence in Malta deeply transformed the character of the islands and their people. It seems as if Braudel must have had Malta in mind when he wrote that an 'accidental' change of ruler or of fortune may bring to the island's shores an entirely different civilization and way of life', thereby transforming that island's character.⁴⁹ This chapter has attempted to show that being on Malta, in turn, also affected the Order, in this case, the religious culture of Hospitallers. Studying religion through an island-approach provides some new insights. Even in a small island like Malta – or the small 'island' constituted by a galley – people lived their lives within different social settings, which were nonetheless concurrent and overlapping. Isolation and connectivity, in conjunction with insulation and smallness created a particular dynamic within which Hospitaller faith unfolded. The sample of case studies presented in the last part of the discussion highlight the high level of integration between Hospitaller faith and popular religious ideas in Malta, here referring not just to native Maltese but also to the Muslims and Jews living there. Hospitaller religious culture emerges as a hybrid of various currents formed within the small, insular but connected limits of Malta. In a sense, isolation breeds innovation: a way of understanding religion and dealing with the world that reflected the particularity of an institution with a sedentary headquarters but a mobile organization.

⁴⁶ AIM Vol. 168 Case 34, n.p., 27 March 1625.

⁴⁷ AIM Vol. 169 Case 70, fols 1–2, 6 April 1599.

⁴⁸ AIM Vol. 169 Case 78, fols 1–2, 12 April 1602.

⁴⁹ Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, p. 150.

